

American conductor Michael Avagliano is obsessed with redefining what's possible for an orchestra. His focus on ambitious local collaborations and active community involvement helped the Somerset Symphony Orchestra grow into a regional force in New Jersey and led to significant audience growth in the Summit Symphony Orchestra, both of which he serves as music director. Originally inspired to become a conductor after a chance meeting with Leonard Bernstein as a student, Avagliano continues to draw inspiration from the legendary maestro's twin legacies: exuberant musicianship and a devotion to broadening classical music audiences. In meeting the former of the two, Avagliano has maintained focus on musical excellence: during his tenure, the Somerset Symphony has twice been named runner-up for the annual American Prize in Orchestral Performance.

He is increasingly sought after as a guest conductor; highlights of the recent season include conducting the Cleveland Pops at Severance Hall and the Allentown Symphony at Miller Theatre. Additionally, he has led over 15 orchestras across the United States and Europe, including the Bohuslav Martinu Philharmonic (Czech Republic), Pleven Philharmonic (Bulgaria), Scuola Populare di Testaccio (Italy), Plainfield Symphony (NJ), and University of Oregon Symphony. In a March 2020 performance, Avagliano was praised for an "effective, powerful performance" (New York Classical Review) in leading the Bachanalia Chamber Orchestra at New York City's Merkin Hall.

To meet Bernstein's second challenge of audience building, Avagliano's most visible achievement with the Somerset Symphony came in helming the organization's first ever opera and ballet productions: Die Zauberflöte (The Magic Flute) and Lebedínoye ózero (Swan Lake) in 2014. Co-presented with Light Opera of New Jersey and FM Dance Company respectively, the relationship between the SSO and LONJ has endured—the two organizations subsequently produced Don Pasquale and La Fille du Regiment.

Mr. Avagliano places a premium on integrating the orchestras he leads with underserved communities, leading orchestras in elder-care facilities, hospitals and other places outside the concert hall, With the SSO, among his proudest accomplishments is performing alongside the young dancers of New Jersey's Thomas Jefferson Arts Academy — a rare opportunity for dancers at that age. Leading the Summit Symphony, Avagliano orchestrated a collaboration with Summit High School students, projecting their artwork on stage during a performance of "Pictures at an Exhibition", as well as the orchestra's biannual Young Artists competition.

When not leading orchestras, Mr. Avagliano turns his attention to mentoring the next generation of young conductors, imparting skills needed both on the podium and off. To train musicianship, he founded the International Conducting Masterclass in Stony Point, NY. Conversely, his online workshop Conducting the Interview focused on career-building, teaching conductors significant skills in applying for positions as conductor and music director. One of the most comprehensive workshops of its kind, participants held mock interviews with a panel of industry professionals led by Henry Fogel, former president of the League of American Orchestras. Hoping to build upon the success of these initiatives and construct further ones,

Avagliano founded the Performers Learning Alliance in 2020, a nonprofit organization dedicated to creating educational and performance opportunities for emerging artists.

Building on the educational side of his passion for conducting, Mr. Avagliano has worked in masterclasses and workshops with Neil Varon, Kenneth Kiesler, Phillip Greenberg, Diane Wittry, and Kirk Trevor. He has studied under Kynan Johns and Markand Thakar, and also serves as associate faculty at Maestro Thakar's workshop through Conducting Programs International. A trained violinist and violist, Avagliano continues to perform and educate under his adjunct professorship of violin and viola at Drew University, and has performed with the internationally acclaimed Madison String Quartet since 2000.

Michael holds degrees from Indiana University and received his doctorate in orchestral conducting from Rutgers University. He resides in New Jersey with his wife, violinist Evelyn Estava.